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L. M. Nairne

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ORATION

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CHARLES MURRAY NAIRNE, M. A.,

BEFORE THE

Philoclean & Peithessophian Societies

OF

RUTGERS COLLEGE,

NEW BRUNSWICK, N. J.



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PHILOCLEAN HALL, June 30, 1857.

PROF. CHARLES M. NAIRNE,

SIR:—At a Special Meeting of the Philoclean Society, held this day, it was unanimously resolved that a vote of thanks be tendered to CHARLES MURRAY NAIRNE, for his very interesting and ELOQUENT Address, and that a copy of the same be requested for publication.

We, the Committee, sincerely hope you will comply with the wishes of the Society.

CYRUS B. DURAND,
JOHN B. DRURY,
T. SANDFORD DOOLITTLE.



NEW YORK, July 1st, 1857.

GENTLEMEN:—

I have much pleasure in acknowledging your vote of thanks, and in giving up my manuscript to your Society for publication.

I remain,

Very sincerely yours,

CHARLES MURRAY NAIRNE.

TO CYRUS B. DURAND,
JOHN B. DRURY,
T. SANDFORD DOOLITTLE.

ORATION.

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN OF THE

PHILOCLEAN AND PEITHESSOPHIAN SOCIETIES :

Judging from the exercises with which your academical course is closed, and the crowds of delighted listeners who always countenance your efforts on such occasions, one would conclude that, both in your estimation and in theirs, Oratory is regarded as the crown of all your labors—the bright consummate flower of all your cultivation.—And who will venture to discourage you by pronouncing this estimate erroneous? I am aware that men of mere literature and science are prone to underrate any excellence except that which belongs to their own pursuits.—They forget that simple intellectual or artistic power may exist, and very frequently does exist, without that practical sagacity, and force of will, which are necessary to govern men ; and that a first-rate ruler or general might make nothing better, with any amount of training, than a second-rate orator, philosopher, or poet. Nevertheless, as a test of the mental activity, strength, and symmetry to which your college culture has conducted you, I know of no single exercise more decisive than the production of a speech. It is better to give than to receive — to bring forth than to absorb ; and many a student, who has succeeded in master-

ing the conceptions of others, may fail in reproducing the *results* of his study, in a composition of his own. Philosophy may have been pondered that he might learn the nature and laws of mind; science, that he might learn to analyse and deduce; rhetoric and language, that he might learn to clothe his ideas in suitable words; and in all these he may have made respectable proficiency; he may also have gathered a store of facts and principles from history and general reading, and of images from poetry and eloquence; still, if he is found wanting in the power of making use of his acquisitions in some original production, his training has certainly come short of its proper end. Unless as a mechanical hearer of recitations, sometimes called a teacher, or a dry, insect-like perforator of some narrow stratum in the wide world of knowledge, sometimes called a savant, he does not deserve the name of a productive laborer. He is a plant without fruit—a failure—an unfinished man! There is no academical duty which taxes a student's abilities so much as the work of really good composition. Its difficulty is notorious in every school; and while your pupil will pore willingly over classics, or mathematics, or physics, or philosophy, striving to comprehend and remember the thoughts of other men,—he goes either reluctantly, or with a profound sense of its arduousness, to the task of gracefully embodying his own. The preparation of lessons may be done—not with absolute perfection, I admit,—but yet very respectably, while the whole soul is never fully awake; but all the energies of the soul must be aroused to the utmost for the elaboration of a meritorious essay or oration. This task demands the same enthusiastic wakefulness, as original scientific research, and the

exercise of a greater number of faculties,—of faculties, indeed, which the mere scientific investigator may not possess. It is the assemblage and concentration of all your accomplishments in one grand exhibition of your proficiency.

In the retrospect of my own university life, I can recall the frequent pretences of prize essays being written in a few hours, and of prize poems thrown off by some young prodigy—some Lucilius without his mud—who could dictate two hundred verses while standing on one foot.—If these representations had been true, the essays, I fear, would never have been crowned, and the verses would have been as lame as the poet's own attitude. Your experience, I am persuaded, will bear me out in pronouncing all such pretensions false; for even when the mere process of writing may have been comparatively easy and rapid, the materials of the composition must have been previously familiarized to the mind of the writer, either by careful special research, or in the course of his general study and reflection. From nothing, nothing is made; and the inspiration even of Genius is by no means identical with that of the twelve apostles, who were commanded not to think beforehand of what they should say in their mission, because a mouth and wisdom irresistible were promised them in the hour of need. No such promise has been made either to you or to me. Our eloquence, if we have any, must be supplied from provident accumulations; else it will be of little credit to ourselves, and small advantage to our hearers. Besides, the very wonderfulness of the improvisatore productions, whose existence I have presumed to question, is

founded on the admitted difficulty of good writing ; for where there is no extraordinary difficulty there can be no miracle.

" Nec deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus !"

Nor is this estimate of the excellence of oratory peculiar to the student. It is also the general estimate of mankind. The time has never been when the admiration of the human race has not been divided between these two—the great speaker and the great warrior. The genius of Homer is more diffuse, but not more loftily inspired, in picturing the exploits of Achilles, than in describing the eloquence of Nestor and Ulysses ; and the Indian Chief is as proud of his oratory as of his daring. Some years ago we had a work on the decisive battles of the world. A suitable companion to this, would be another on the decisive conventions of the world ; and I believe that in the hands of a competent historian, the latter would be equally exciting with the former. Doubtless there is a fascinating sublimity in the career of a conqueror. The imagination dwells with rapture, on the long procession of his legions, their helms and corslets flashing over the land, and their ensigns waving interminably to the horizon's verge ; the gorgeous troop of chieftains and bannermen that surround his car ; the swell of martial music, inspiring valor, and measuring the tramp of his innumerable host ; the shock of charging squadrons ; the bravery that laughs at death, and exults amid thunders more terrible than those of heaven ; the capture and the rescue ; the rout and the rally, and all the dread magnificence of war ! But there is a loftier, although a calmer sublimity—at least we can well conceive of such—in the

triumph of a great speaker, for "earthly power doth then show likest God's," when an eloquent man holds the hearts of myriads in his grasp, and turns them whithersoever he wills. Picture to yourselves the collected rank and wisdom of some mighty realm—an assemblage of all that is great, and sage, and learned—within some ancient pile of high renown, or on some famous plain, where the vaulted sky affords a grander canopy than fretted roof and pillared dome, and the congregated people form a nobler environment than sculptured walls! They are met to deliberate on some great scheme or enterprise,—some holy crusade or declaration of independence—that involves the world's fate throughout all future time,—and high amid the throng stands forth the Orator! On him all eyes are bent, to him all hearts are turned, his very look draws audience, his voice goes forth amid the hush, and no pealing organ or grand orchestra ever sent out through ten thousand breasts a wave of influence so electrical! Truth grows to full stature as his proof proceeds, the general judgment is carried captive, and, while demonstration and conviction are followed up by persuasion, and pathos, and passionate appeal, and patriotic fervor, and indignant denunciation, the multitude, like ocean beneath the breeze, stirs submissive to his words—it trembles, it swells, it fluctuates, it uplifts the thunder of its acclaim—the cry ascends, "It is the will of God!"—the lightning of eloquence hath fused the souls of that assembly into one, and who shall now withstand the burning torrent? This is verily a triumph beyond the soldier's ovation, a conquest without humiliation, a subjugation unattended either by suffering or shame!

Or can we not conceive a display of oratory grander still, though accompanied by less of worldly pomp? The Son of Man, who spake as never man spake, and whose divine countenance it has, for ages, been the pride of highest art to portray—seated on the mountain side, or by the crowded shore, and uttering with a majesty of eloquence, “above all Greek, above all Roman fame,” the sublime revelations of the Evangel? Or Paul on Mars’ Hill, casting into shade, more by the superiority of his theme than the perfection of his rhetoric, the glory of Demosthenes, amid the children of those same Athenians whom the illustrious orator had roused to stem the aggressions of the Macedonian king? Or some heroic old covenanter, from whose heart the fear of God had expelled all fear of man, sustaining the courage of persecuted saints, as by the rushing waterfall, or on the lonely moor, or in the sequestered burial ground, amid the tombs of their fathers, he preached to them the resurrection of those dead, and the bliss of immortality? Or the rapt missionary—leader of the only true crusade—proclaiming to the wondering ears of idol-worshippers, amid the snows of Greenland, or the soft luxuriance of Hindostan, the attributes of the only living God, the love of the only Redeemer, and the dread recompenses of an eternity that no longer remained a delusion and a dream? What thinking man will say that these heavenly uses of eloquence do not place the orator on the very topmost pinnacle of human greatness?

Such may be regarded as the general estimate of oratory among men. But there are communities in which, from the nature of their institutions, eloquence is of special

value, and the gifts of the orator invest him with a special power. A despotic empire can be no nursery for truly great speakers. There, few great subjects fall to be discussed. Political rights and public interests — those noblest fields of eloquence — are overlaid by absolute rule. Even religion is a thing prescribed and watched, and the tongue of the orator must be attuned to no loftier theme than the flattery of an autocrat, or the vain ceremonies of a compulsory faith. The strained laudations of terrified imbecility, and boastful reminiscences of glory passed away, are, even in the mouth of a Cicero, poor substitutes for the natural inspirations of honest truth, the glow of patriotism, and the trumpet strains of independence. On the other hand, wherever freedom has found a home, there eloquence will flourish. The empire of Opinion is there established, and an *idea* is more influential than a sceptre. In such a state, he who can control the intellect, and heart, and will of the people, is the real potentate. He leads his countrymen. — He defends his country. He makes peace and declares war. He is the highest and most legitimate of principalities and powers. Now, this is precisely the kind of a community in which our lot is cast; and hence in no other is the truly eloquent man more needed, and more entitled to public admiration. America has been jocularly satirized by one of her most gifted sons, as a mighty Logocracy — a huge government of talk! No doubt the frequency of our rhetorical exhibitions, and the incompetency of many who, for lack of better men, are thrust forward on such occasions, lay her open to ridicule and sarcasm. Let it never be forgotten, however, that our very passion for public speaking is a token of our liberty; and our true wisdom is, not to

laugh at the passion, or attempt suppressing it; but to regulate it, to refine it, to enlighten it, and to use it. To us a discussion of oratory is no mere speculation, like the character of some foreign sage or hero; no mere recreation, like poetical or picturesque reminiscences of Rome or Venice. It is a thoroughly practical question; an absolutely vital question. It involves our prosperity and existence as a nation. Our talkers are our guides and governors; and surely a mighty matter would be gained, if, in any way, it could be brought about that our platform brawlers, our shallow ranters, and common-place figure-mongers, instead of having the *best* chance, should have little or no chance at all; if the common judgment were so enlightened, and the common taste so rectified, that mere glitter should not pass for substance—mere words for things—mere “sound and fury signifying nothing” for eloquence—bragging for conscious worth—mob flattery for public spirit—abuse for argument—libel for logic—sneers for sense,—and vituperation for demonstration. And to whom, gentlemen, can we look for the desired process of enlightenment and rectification, if not to our students? Their avowed object is to become leaders of our country’s thought. They are in training either for orators, or for judges of oratory.—They hope to be the lights of the land; but if the very light that is among us be darkness, how great is that darkness! Allow me, therefore, in the remainder of this address, to furnish you, if I can, with some tests whereby you may try the spirit of eloquence both in yourselves and others, and with some considerations which may constrain you to hold fast by that which is good. In doing this I shall not content myself with simple precept, but shall add thereto

the illustration of successful example. The example I have chosen is that of Thomas Chalmers, the Scottish preacher; not that his oratory was, by any means, perfect, but because he was a more effective speaker than any I ever heard, and because I have had the best opportunities of ascertaining the secrets and peculiarities of that art, by which he acted, with an absolutely magical power, on the multitudes who hung upon his lips.

What, therefore, is Oratory? Let us first attempt to approach our answer retrogressively—to back up to it, if I may use such a common phrase—by a series of negatives.

Oratory, is not delivery. In the days of Demosthenes, men had not got so far as to separate eloquence from speech. Eloquence and elocution, deriving their names from the same root, were almost or altogether identical. On no other principle can we explain the oft-quoted opinion of the Greek statesman, when he affirmed that action was the first, second, and third requisite of oratory; for now-a-days, we should say that he was describing a stage player—not an orator. The press is a power of modern times, and modern speech-makers can address millions, without the instrumentality of voice or gesture.—These we are left to supply ourselves, as we do scenery and action in perusing a drama; and hence we characterize a speech as eloquent, apart altogether from its delivery.—The great orations of antiquity are eloquent still, and would be so, had they never been addressed to an audience. Their immortality is not due to action, which passed away for ever with the occasion of their utterance. It is true that a

finished delivery will set off a discourse which may exhibit few or none of the higher attributes of eloquence, and therefore, as Demosthenes averred, delivery ought to be a matter of much care with him who aims at oratorical success. Yet elocution no more constitutes eloquence than smooth versification constitutes poetry. No speech is really eloquent, which is not eloquent when coolly perused in the privacy of our own chambers. Gesture, tone, and emphasis, are nothing else than accessories of oratory ; and would be as far from rendering common places eloquent, as a dress of lace and spangles would be, from converting a wooden image of the Virgin Mary into a Greek Slave, or a Venus di Medicis. The vulgar might, and would, admire the block for its finery ; but the refined and tasteful would prefer the naked marble, for that intrinsic beauty, which foreign ornament might easily mar, but could not possibly improve.

With respect to the celebrated saying of Demosthenes, I cannot help thinking—may I be pardoned for the presumption ! — that both Cicero and Quintilian must have misapprehended its true meaning. To lay so much stress on mere delivery is manifestly absurd ; for a poor speech with elaborate action would be ridiculous—as ridiculous as Tom Thumb in the costume of Napoleon, or a fishing boat in the rig of a man-of-war. May not the Grecian orator have intended to recommend, in addition to an animated delivery, the study of that style which Aristotle has named the “agonistic,” wherein we *wrestle* with an auditory, in opposition to the “graphic,” which we use in the written disquisition or essay ? The style of a speech, even when

composed in the closet, ought to be vehement and dramatic, as is natural to one who may be supposed to address an assembly without premeditation, and on the spur of some pressing and momentous occasion. When Lord Jeffrey went into parliament, he delivered a learned and labored production in favor of the English Reform Bill. It was, in fact, the best argument on that side of the question; nevertheless it fell almost dead on the house, because, as the newspapers of the time described it, it was nothing but a spoken article; very suitable for the written pages of the *Edinburgh Review*, but very unsuitable for the agonistic arena of the House of Commons. It wanted *action*. It could not possibly be taken for the fresh, natural utterance of spontaneous thought and feeling. It was anything but Demosthenic.

Delivery, then, is not oratory. It is far from being even the first requisite of oratory. Neither again, is oratory mere accurate and convincing ratiocination; for, in that case, Euclid's *Elements of Geometry* would be the most eloquent of books, and the "*pons asinorum*" would stand as a rival to the *περὶ στεφάνου*. Logical demonstration is not oratory; but as will more particularly appear hereafter, it is an essential attribute of true eloquence.

Nor, further, is oratory the simple power of stirring the passions; for a speech that proves nothing, but deals only in passionate appeals, cannot be effectual except on rare occasions; that is, when the facts which constitute the ground of the appeal are well known, or have been previously established by proof. An advocate who should overlook the law and testimony in a case, and run off into

general declamation, could succeed only with a foolish jury, and a more foolish judge; and even a eulogist must show some good claim to praise on the part of his hero, if he expects an intelligent audience to sympathize in his encomium. Besides, even if we did define eloquence to be the faculty of exciting emotion, we should not come one whit nearer a true and satisfactory account of its nature.—The question would still remain unsolved; what is the secret of that power? In other words, we are brought back, at the conclusion of all our negatives, to the original enquiry:—What is Oratory?

The difficulty of an answer is obvious. It is as hard to tell what Oratory is, as to tell what Poetry is. All the fine arts have a close relation to each other; and perhaps in seeking for the essential characteristic of one, we may fall upon that of another also.

In my school-days, when I had lost one shaft,
I shot his fellow of the self-same flight
The self-same way, with more advised watch,
To find the other forth; and by adventuring both
I oft found both.

Let us try, then, the art of Painting; so near akin to Poetry that Horace, you remember, thus unites them:

“————— Pictoribus atque poetis
Quidlibet audendi semper fuit aequa potestas;”

and let us take for illustration one of the simplest exhibitions of the art. We may have two portraits of the same person, which are accurate likenesses, while only one of

them proves the possession of *Genius* by the artist. In the one we can trace all the features of the original. All the *necessary* of a portrait is there, but nothing whatever of the *possible*; no sublimation of the mere mortal into the immortal; no penetration and forth-showing of the inner man, no irradiation of humanity with the light of imagination; no appearance, on the painted figure, of aught save plain, matter-of-fact existence. In the other we have more than matter-of-fact. Truth—the whole truth is there; yet not simply the truth as it is, but likewise the truth as it ought to be—an approximation, at least, to the portraiture of the body, as it shall appear, when, retaining all its features, it shall, notwithstanding, be raised a glorious body. It is thus that *Genius* anticipates Heaven!

Or, to take a second illustration from Sculpture. The Apollo Belvidere is not merely a handsome statue—faultless in face and form. It is a divinity in marble—

“The Sun in human limbs arrayed”—

an embodiment of beauty and grace, majesty and power, which we almost think we could separate from the image, as if they were hovering around it, or emanating from it.—It shows all the *necessary* in member, joint, and lineament, and all the possible in the ideal of our nature. It is poetry in stone!

And thus we are brought to the same blending of the possible with the necessary in poetry. Remember always that this blending is not the incongruous addition of perfection to imperfection. It is no mechanical mixture of “iron

with miry clay." It is a substantial union of the divine with the human — the celestial with the earthly — the etherializing of things that be, into things that may be, while yet they preserve their identity. To Peter Bell, that most prosaic personage with most unpoetical name, depicted by Wordsworth —

" A primrose by a river's brim,

A yellow primrose was to him,

And it was nothing more."

It presented all the necessary of a flower. But a mind of another order would have made it poetical—sublimed it into such an object as it would have appeared to Eve in paradise, or to an angel by the river of life!

Now, have we anything like this process in oratory? No doubt we have. It is this which distinguishes it from common talk, and pedestrian disquisition. Still oratory is not poetry. The celestial element is differently exhibited. In poetry, earth is raised to heaven; in oratory, heaven is brought down to earth. In the former, it is as if a man assumed the tongue of an angel; in the latter, it is as if an angel brought his bright mind, and glowing speech to bear on things terrestrial. There is, in oratory, a more practical exercise of genius than in poetry—a more direct application of its energy to every-day matters. Eloquence is the beauty of utility; poetry is the utility of beauty. Eloquence resembles the breeze of heaven in the sail of a majestic vessel wafting onward the productions of human labor; poetry is like the light of heaven that floats around

all objects, and seems to animate them, and fills the air as with an ether of life!

But after all, as in poetry, so in oratory, we must be contented, perhaps, with an appeal to the consciousness of men in respect to the feeling of it. We know it when it comes before us, if we are endowed with the faculty of apprehending it; and to those who cannot apprehend it on being simply presented, no definition will suffice to render it palpable. We may mention, however, certain qualities of eloquence which explanation will make more clear, and which may be so far acquired by care and practice. If we are not able to impart "the gift and faculty divine" that make the orator, we may put the oratorical aspirant in the fair way of doing justice to his inspiration, if he happens to have any.

And *First*, the eloquent man is *natural*. His manner, his tones, his style, his argumentation, his feeling, his flights of fancy, are all the spontaneous results of his mind's being fully occupied with his subject, and with nothing else, for the time being. A manner studied and artificial; tones that rise not from, and correspond not with, the sentiment he utters; a style that attracts attention to itself, and is not the transparent vehicle of his thoughts; reasoning that is far-fetched and fantastic, such as Shakespeare ridicules in Polonius; pathos that tends to start no tear because it finds no sympathy; and figures that neither elucidate nor adorn, but are only attempts to make the people say "how *smart* he is," constitute a mere parody of oratory, scarcely im-

sing on the ignorant, and fitted to provoke the mirth of wise men, if their disgust did not stifle their laughter.

Archbishop Whateley who, although himself no orator, is yet an admirable judge of eloquence, has said—and, by the way, we recommend to all students his observations on this point—that elocution and declamation, as commonly studied, have spoiled more speakers than they have benefited. In this I heartily agree with the Archbishop; for the artificial inflexions, tones, postures, stretchings forth of the hands, and heavenward rolling of the eyes, exhibited by persons who attempt to put their elocution in practice, and their ambitious imitations of the speeches which they have parrotted for spouting, counterfeit nature more abominably than the great, stiff, staring dolls that excite rustic wonder in the shop windows of a metropolitan hair dresser. One flash of real nature is worth a whole eternity of such mummery. If our attention to gesture and inflexion has been carried so far as to cure all awkwardness of tone and motion, then we have really made a valuable acquisition. We can then give our feelings full play, without the risk of ungracefulness. But if our art and practice in vocal gymnastics go not so far as to conceal themselves by becoming a second nature, we had better rest contented with that which nature has originally bestowed on us, and which she will certainly not fail to display, if we honor her with the faith of true men. The accomplished musician thinks of his theme, and not of his fingers, when he charms the sense, and so must the speaker of his theme, and not of his tones and postures, if he would charm the soul. His voice must be attuned, his limbs must be moved, as his thoughts must be suppli-

ed, from within, and as little as possible from without, himself.

Secondly, an eloquent man is *natural* because he is *earnest* and *honest*. His heart's desire is to communicate with the mind of his audience—to lay hold of it and wield it for some cherished purpose. Neither can his oratory be of the highest order unless his earnestness springs from thoroughly honest conviction, and passionate love of truth. The hired defender of the guilty, and the partizan advocate of a faction, fight for victory and spoil; and in the excitement of the contest, they may summon up a theatrical and transient earnestness; but that earnestness can no more be compared with the fervor of an honest truth-worshipper, than the valor of a *filibustero* deserves to be compared with the courage of a patriot—the heroism of Walker with the heroism of Washington. In the latter sort of earnestness there is no selfishness, and hence it can lead to no display of self. Only let it be pure and strong enough, and the man who is under its inspiration will never be chargeable with unlawful artifice, or vain-glorious exhibition. Both end and means will be worthy. The appropriateness of every element in his discourse will be in direct proportion to the singleness and intensity of his desire to enforce truth; and however poorly he may have been exercised in the *study* of speech-making, he will at least show no hollow rhetoric, no conceited reasoning, no affected intonation, no incongruous action. Honest nature will have her way, and shame the art of the schools. If men who attempt oratory could only divest themselves of the idea of themselves; if they were really taken up with the subject of their speech alone

—if they would confine themselves to the single aim of stating and enforcing truth with some adequate sense of its importance, and leave vanity and popularity at home, how much folly would be avoided by speakers, and how much pain spared on the part of pitying and wearied listeners.— A man thoroughly, purely in earnest does not talk as a mere talker. He says what he has to say, and is content. He speaks as if his sole concern were the truth and pertinence, not the beauty and brilliancy, of what he utters. And even in the retirement of the closet, he who writes best, is he who writes with the single, sincere purpose of presenting Truth in her own naked symmetry and glory. Genuine oratory walks and does not dance, marches and does not minuet, rushes and does not gracefully caper !

In the *Third* place, there cannot be true eloquence without solid thought. Eloquence is not pretty sentences, and ornate diction ; neither is it, as some suppose, the power of dramatic anecdote, whether picturesque, pathetic or ludicrous. Eloquence is not any of these, although they all may frequently, and with propriety go along with it ; but it is thought and demonstration clothed with sentiment, adorned as the goodly tree is, by the efflorescence of its own branches, not by garlands hung on, and above all, instinct with the fervor of a truth-worshipper. A discourse that *proves* nothing may be graceful and effecting ; but it does not deserve the name of oratory ; and even *its* power to move depends, as I have said before, on its being an exposition of things that have been previously established by proof. Declamation that has no substratum of substantial mind-work, is mere literary syllabub — frothy, windy, and,

in large doses, sickening. *Oratory is impassioned argument.*

But the advance of time warns me to quit this general speculation on the nature and properties of eloquence, and proceed to the consideration of the oratory of Chalmers, which I have proposed as our special exemplification. In pointing out the characteristics of his eloquence, I shall, in addition to other matters, be able to show you, how the three great qualities of naturalness, earnestness, and impassioned argumentation, will overcome many defects, which, without these qualities, would have been laughable or displeasing. For while no man ever excelled the Scottish preacher in the overwhelming efficacy of his displays, no man, with an orator's reputation, was ever more careless of many of the adjuncts of oratory, or cumbered the free course of his conceptions, by a more artificial and singular style. He was great in spite of these peculiarities; and perhaps ultimately they came to possess, for his admirers, a certain charm, as being suggestive of the man.

Like all great men, Chalmers was a lover of knowledge; but there were certain ideas which he grappled to his heart with the ardor of a peculiar and enthusiastic affection. Most philosophers have a favorite walk of investigation; and to that, in all its particulars, their thoughts are turned. They explore it, not only in its great features, but even in its most minute, and are not satisfied till they feel perfectly at home in all. But Chalmers can scarcely be said to have thoroughly mastered any one science: I would not except even Ethics and Theology. Far be it from me to

insinuate that he had not power to scale the loftiest heights, and search the profoundest depths of any subject. He could have been, if he had chosen, a mathematician, astronomer, chemist, geologist, linguist, or metaphysician of the very highest order. But Divine Providence withdrew him, in mid career, from the pursuit of science, and demanded the consecration of all his gifts to the revival of Evangelism in the church of his fathers, and the continuance of the great work which the Scottish Reformers began, but which had long been laid aside for the cultivation of mere literature, by such ecclesiastical leaders as Robertson and Blair. From that moment, Chalmers ceased to think that study ought to be pursued for one's own pleasure only. He studied for the advantage of the human race. This was his whole aim; and whether his subject was metaphysics or mathematics, political economy or divinity, he was not contented with the mere enjoyment derived from the exercise of his own genius; no, nor yet the discovery of truth and the fame of scientific scholarship—but his chief aim was to apply the researches of philosophy to the well being of the world.—All his knowledge was gathered that he might justify the ways of God to man, and bring back into harmony and happiness the constitution of things, as it was originally framed by the Creator. These circumstances will explain the fragmentary nature of his acquirements. He sought no more information on any subject than was necessary for this high purpose; but he did seek such information on a great variety of subjects. The same has been the case with many other illustrious orators. Lord Brougham is a remarkable instance in point. Without a minutely profound acquaintance with science, his lordship is so far a living ency-

leopædia, that he can draw felicitous illustrations from many quarters, and his mind is so completely imbued with the philosophic and logical spirit of science, that his speeches are truly impassioned *demonstrations*. His researches have been conducted *oratorically*; that is, only to such an extent as an orator requires to go for the composition of a great speech, and a statesman for high mental training. A minute knowledge of science is one thing, and a scientific spirit is another. An expert application of the transcendental calculus, or an acute perception of geometrical relations, is different from that mental symmetry and mathematical metaphysique, which are the very soul of all reasoning, and which remove every effort of a really great orator out of the category of mere declamation. A simple mathematician is a one-sided man; an exceeding dry man; an angular, rectilineal, diagrammatic, square root of a man;—but there never was an orator of the very highest order, who could not have been a great mathematician, if he had made that science his peculiar study.

Chalmers courted not semblance but substance—not prettiness, but *power*. His marvellous faculty of illustration, and his towering fancy—those gifts which would have gained him renown as a poet—were never exercised for the sake of mere ornament. Whatever he said he must *prove* something. His mind would not permit him to talk without arguing. Hence he is never vapid. Amid the brightest blaze of his imagery, we discern a substantial and symmetrical form. His discourses may be likened to structures—not always—in fact, not often, belonging to any regular order of architecture—but always fine, and always useful in their

every part. You cannot discern a column, or buttress, or bracket, placed for mere embellishment. Sculptured it may be, even to a profusion of richness; yet it is always introduced for real support. Anything that is appended simply for show is, in oratory, as well as in architecture, an untasteful redundancy. It matters not how beautiful it may be in itself, if, in its actual position, it is useless. Imagery that conceals, rather than sets off, the truth, is no better than bright rags—the *purpurei panni* of the Roman Satirist.—Unnecessary ornament in a speech is as bad as if a soldier should carry a pennon in his sword hand, to embarrass his own attack, and not upon the staff of his lance to scare the steed of his adversary. Now Chalmers's demonstrative propensity guards him almost always against this abuse; and that is the grand secret of his eloquence. Its *strength* is equally remarkable with its *gorgeousness*. His very descriptions and similes are arguments. In one of his astronomical discourses, he refutes the infidel objection to divine revelation, which is based on the material insignificance of our planet when compared with the whole universe of God; and in doing so, he charms and melts us with the description of a mariner — “a sailor boy”—in a tempest, and afterwards amid the dangers and hardships of some savage isle. But when we find him, in the end of the passage, introducing the thought that the distresses of this wanderer absorb the soul of his parent, as she listens to the howling of the storm, and forgets all her children except him, because they are safe at home, while he is far away and in peril, we perceive that the whole is only a picturesque argument to justify the yearning of the Great Parent over that province of His dominions which had gone astray, while the rest re-

mained true to their allegiance — which was forlorn and hopeless, while the rest were rejoicing in the blessedness of their Father's home. The same may be said of his description of the English fox-hunt in his sermon on cruelty to animals. This brilliantly poetic scene is not painted for mere effect; neither is it presented for the sake of welding to its termination certain common-place reflections, beginning with *ah!* and *alas!* on the barbarity of human sports. This is what a common declaimer would have done. But in Chalmers's mouth it is a step in a close and ingenious demonstration on the philosophic question of abstract cruelty.— It is truly a useful pillar in the edifice he has been rearing. Scores of examples of the same kind might be gathered from the Doctor's writings. It is in this argumentative idiosyncrasy that his great strength lies; and here he reads a noble lesson to all who would be really eloquent.

• The truth is, that Doctor Chalmers was a man of most fervid earnestness, and notwithstanding all his peculiarities, eminently natural. It would be the greatest possible mistake to suppose that he was, to any noticeable extent, tinctured with the vanity of self-display. Doubtless he shared with other illustrious men in the love of fame — “that last infirmity of noble minds;” but his glowing love for his brethren of the species, and his heart's desire to see them good and happy, both here and hereafter, were so strong and over-mastering, as to divest him of all, or nearly all exhibition of himself, and the affectation of what some men call fine writing. More than any speaker I ever listened to, he abandoned himself, in the delivery of his discourses, to the full energy of his feelings; and, like a good “spirit-

ual medium" of the present day, he seemed entirely passive to the inspiration of his own genius. It possessed him. It bore him along as in a chariot of fire; and no hearer had inclination or power to observe whether the writing was fine or no. To criticise the composition was out of the question. The spirit of criticism was exorcised by the spell of the orator's vehemence. The truth spoken was everything, the terms employed were nothing. Indeed, I have often felt, in the utterance of his grandest passages, an effect similar to that produced by instrumental music, which lodges an idea, or raises an emotion in the soul, without the intervention of words. The thought and feeling were there; but if you had attempted to report the language, you would have found the task impossible. Your attention had been so entirely occupied with the truth conveyed, that you lost all consciousness of the vehicle. This, surely, was the very triumph of earnestness; and no man can hope to entrance an audience as Chalmers did, unless he can, in like manner, totally forget himself, and abandon his body, soul, and spirit to the force of truth alone!

It was this combination, therefore, of intense, heart-blood earnestness, and vivid demonstration, with a fervid and lofty imagination in Chalmers, that rendered his eloquence so effective, and that makes his discourses read so well in private. Aided greatly in their force by his own energetic pronunciation of them, they are, nevertheless, not of that kind which, when perused in the closet, cause us to wonder wherein their charm consisted when pronounced. Hugh Miller, in that sad but noble dying "Testimony" of his, speaks of Chalmers's oratory as something wonderful that

“lives in memory as a vanished *power*, which even his extraordinary writings fail adequately to represent.” Still the writings, apart altogether from their delivery, are extraordinary ; and that is the real point of distinction between declamation and genuine eloquence.

Doctor Chalmers’s oratory was effective, partly in consequence of his style and delivery, and partly in spite of these. His style was formed upon that of the old puritan and presbyterian divines ; but it was at the same time very much his own. Their phrases and idioms he adopted — and he loved them because they were, in a great measure, the same as, or similar to, those of the Bible ; but the structure of his periods was entirely different from theirs. It was not conversational, neither did it bear the marks of being easily executed. The fact is, that composition as well as thinking, in the case of Chalmers, was a laborious matter, and in both, he appears to have had an utter aversion to common-place, or to anything resembling common-place. Hence his very limited extemporaneous power. Doctor Samuel Johnson *thought* in the same style with other men, and then translated the ideas thus embodied, into his well-known sonorous and mechanical rhythm. Instances of this double process are on record — instances in which the great moralist first expressed himself in ordinary terms, and then clothed the sentiment anew in its characteristic dress. It was even so with Chalmers. His written, and much of his spoken, language, was translated from the ordinary vehicle of thought, into his own peculiar style. But in this style, with all its impurities, there is a force, and a majesty, and grand music, which, in themselves, possess a fascination.—

Both auditor and reader are carried along by its very ponderosity, and the roll of its oriental and barbaric melody. And so sublimely energetic was the man, that the language employed, so far from offending by its singularity, seemed the very instrument that was fitted for the orator's grasp. It was the hammer of Thor, the club of Hercules, the sword of Gideon ! I cannot help recurring to the vehemence — the *ingenium perfervidum* — of the Scottish preacher. The energy of Doctor Chalmers's delivery is inconceivable by any one who never heard him. Those Demosthenic gestures — the *supplosio pedis* and *percussio femoris* — the stamping of the foot and the smiting of the thigh — which gentlemanly Hugh Blair deemed unsuitable to modern oratory, were common manifestations of Chalmers's intensity. He wore a pulpit carpet every year to tatters ; and such too, would have been the fate of his pulpit Bible, had not his beadle fallen on the notable expedient of inserting in the middle of it, where his manuscript lay, a seven-fold shield of the stoutest brown paper ! He was John Knox revived, but a poetical John Knox. In the impetuosity and power of his utterance, in the greatness of his thoughts and sentiments, in the splendid appropriateness of his illustrations, and in the pathetic majesty of his appeals, the awkwardness of a very uncouth gesticulation, and a strikingly provincial pronunciation, were entirely forgotten. — His figure and motions were anything but graceful ; but you saw that all his motions were *natural*. There could be no doubt about that. His voice was not musical, and I rather fear he never took a lesson in elocutionary inflexion ; but his tones and modulations were the spontaneous exponents of genuine feeling ; and when he rose into some of

his loftiest soarings, his organs gave forth a solemn and rapturous sound, like what we can imagine to be the voice of an angel, or "prophet old," sent on some embassy of mingled entreaty, expostulation, and threatening. It was there that he held his audience spell-bound. It was not pathos, it was not sarcasm, it was not ornate description. There might be occasionally the presence of all these.— But it was sublimity, loftiness, celestial grandeur. If you wept, your tears were tears of ecstasy rather than of sorrow; if you trembled, it was as one would tremble were the eternal world disclosed to him; if you rejoiced, your joy was joy unspeakable; and the whole effect was heightened by the certainty, founded on the preacher's scrupulous habit of arguing, that you were not led captive by mere impulse, but that your emotion was the legitimate consequence of a vivid apprehension of truth.

Chalmers was the most honest of all great speakers. He would as soon have thought of cheating you out of your money, as of carrying his point by unfair means. Truth ought to be sustained by truth, and not by stratagem. If you ask me—and I have been asked a hundred times—to what faculty of the soul his eloquence was addressed—to the intellect, the heart, or the imagination? I answer, that it was addressed mainly and ultimately to the *conscience*. The intellect, the heart, and the imagination, he regarded as avenues to this, the ruling power in man; and his demonstrations, his illustrations, his figures, his pathos, were all advances along those avenues to that ruling power. There are many persons who look upon success as the test of oratory. How often do we hear them tell of lawyers, who, by playing on

the feelings of a jury, have liberated miscreants whom they knew to be such ; of diplomatists, who, like Belial in Milton's infernal parliament,

" Could make the worse appear,
The better reason, to perplex and dash
Maturest counsels."

and of political speech-makers, who, by dexterous misrepresentation, and ungenerous abuse of human emotion, have succeeded in cozening whole constituencies out of their suffrages ;—how often do we hear such deceivers lauded as masters in the art of eloquence, and their hollow exhibitions extolled as the highest triumphs in oratory ! The end, say such talkers, will justify the means. An end, which they may deem desirable, is to be attained, and they persuade themselves that all rhetorical artifices are lawful, nay, meritorious, in attaining it. Alas ! this is not the triumph, but the degradation of Eloquence ! Alas ! that the gift of Heaven should so be prostituted ! It is little better than the eloquence of the Devil when he ruined Eve, by lying like truth, and working on the heart of an innocent unsuspecting woman ; or when, in the wilderness of Judea, he tempted the Savior, whose heart was tenderer than woman's, but whose conscience was sovereign of his heart, and more than a match for the Devil. The conscience, after all, is the proper object of the *honest* orator's aim. A speaker may plead interest if he will, or ambition if he will. He may address himself to the love of country, or the indignation, or the revenge, or the pity of his auditors, but if he shrinks from contact with their consciences, he is simply an expert deceiver. He may counsel robbery under the guise of retribution, but he dares not call it

robbery ; he may inflame party spirit under the semblance of patriotism, but he dares not call it party spirit ; he may insinuate licentiousness under the name of liberty, but he dares not call it licentiousness ; he may inculcate infidelity while denouncing bigotry, but he dares not call it infidelity. He is compelled to mask his real endeavors, under terms that stand between him and the *conscience* of those who hear him ; otherwise he would betray the diabolical hoof, and be saluted with the hisses and execrations of the poor dupes who now admire him as an angel of light. Of such scorn Chalmers stood in no danger ; for he loved the honest truth with his whole great soul, and spoke the honest truth like a brave and upright man. To all chicanery he was a total stranger in his own practice, and so generous were his views of human nature that he did not hastily believe even in the duplicity of politicians. It is well remembered when, in his country cottage at Burnt-island, he received intelligence that Lord Aberdeen, then high in the councils of England, had played fast and loose with his proposals for a settlement of the Free Church controversy, how his eyes filled with tears—a most rare and sublime spectacle in Chalmers—and he denounced, far more in sorrow than in anger, those accursed politics—for such were his strong words—which had power to bewitch the mind of one whom he had been accustomed to regard as a nobleman by nature, no less than by imposition of the royal hand. Lord Aberdeen's virtue was Chalmers's last hope ; and that hope gone, he pronounced the fiat which disrupted the venerable Church of Scotland, saying, "If the civil power refuses to be regulated in its relation to the church, that relation must be destroyed !" "Lord

Aberdeen," he added, "has been the sneck-drawer, and I have been the snool, but I would rather be the snool than the sneck-drawer!"—that is, when interpreted, Lord Aberdeen has been the shuffler, and I have been the simpleton, but I would rather be the simpleton than the shuffler! This was, indeed, a noble utterance—very quaint and very characteristic in its expression, but still very noble. He would rather bear the reproach of honesty, and be deceived, than the reputation of *smartness*, and be a deceiver.

And now, gentlemen, what can we do to follow and uphold the example of the great and good man whose oratory we have been considering? In this free country, many or most of us may be called on frequently to address our fellow-citizens, and all of us, in virtue of our education, must, to a greater or less extent, be able to guide the judgment, and regulate the taste of the communities wherein our lot may be cast. Our duty, therefore—our duty as scholars, as men, as christians, as patriots—is to set our faces like flint against all falsehood, all deception, all vain show, all ear-tickling, all mental dissipation, both in ourselves and other men. Let us see to it, that no temptation—no greed of worthless applause, no slavish worship of democracy, shall ever make *us* faithless to that which is true, and lovely because it is true; and that every public speaker—whether he be preacher, advocate, legislator, politician, or lecturer, shall receive most impartially our approbation or disapprobation—our countenance or opposition—just as he adheres to, or deviates from, truth in thought, in word, in action. Be it our task—not arrogantly and ignorantly assumed—but imposed by our common coun-

try, to guard her citizens against the stimulants of oratorical empirics. Let us give our popular instructors to know, that, so far as we can help it, they shall not for bread give the people a stone!

And O ye good people, especially ye young men and maidens—"virginibus puerisque canto"—who deem yourselves arbiters of elegance—pray assure yourselves that it is really bread you are asking for—the staff of mental life, and not some curious sweetmeats—fantastic painted cakes—whereof the nutriment is scanty, and the dyspeptic qualities abundant; or, peradventure, some frothy compound, corrupted into a mere similitude of wine—as Tacitus eighteen hundred years ago described the German beer—but not the generous juice of the grape itself—fit beverage to digest good food, and making glad the heart of gods and men. There is widely-spread and deeply rooted among us, in this country of enterprise and excitement—of hurry and high pressure—a distressing intolerance, a foolish juvenile impatience of thought and demonstration—a luxurious appetite for high-spiced rhetoric—a passive, spectacular indolence, that desires to be fed as infants are—and that too, without even the trouble of absorption—by having the luscious mixture placed within our lips—a pertinacious refusal to meet a reflective speaker half way, and to follow him through any lengthened train of argument—a perverse determination to be tickled and entertained, rather than a manly effort to rouse our thinking faculties, and to task our reason, as Heaven intended we should do, when it made conscience the crown, and reason the sceptre of human sovereignty. This great sin, we maintain, lies at the door

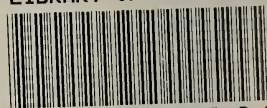
of many of our people, and hence it is that speakers, more intent on popularity than truth ;—greater lovers of transient fame than of their father-land—have made up their minds to indulge this pernicious craving, rather than to cure it—to blaze and sparkle, like fire-works, for the amusement of a crowd, instead of shining, and warming, and giving life, like the great steady sun in the sky. Think not that I exaggerate the dangers of this course. All history tells me that the eloquence of a nation, and the well being of a nation, are united by an indissoluble bond. As the one rises, so rises the other, when the one culminates, so does the other, as the one declines so does the other. They are reciprocally the consequence and the evidence of each other. Out of the abundance of the national heart, the national mouth speaketh. When that heart is sound and true—when it throbs with the pulsations of perfect health, and glows with the fervor of great aspirations, its utterances are utterances of purity, and power, and beauty. When that heart is corrupt, its talk is a meretricious imitation of better things—it is the talk of a self-seeker with meanest purpose in his bosom, and fulsome profession on his lips. The citadel is undermined and the spoiler is nigh. The salt has lost its savor, and when, at last, commotion comes—as come it will—it comes not to purify but to poison—not to send freshness to the clouds, and fatness to the land, but to cast up, as from the depths of a putrid sea, pestilence and desolation ! Let us give good heed to our ways. Our material prosperity is marvellous, our material progress is unparalleled. But how prosper we in public virtue ? What progress have we made in purity and truth ? How many among us have caught the mantles of the great spirits who

ascended from the fields of our early glory? How many of us now have faith and honesty sufficient to divide the waters, should gathering iniquity come in upon us like a flood? Do not our itching ears, and mouths speaking great swelling words of vanity, proclaim our failing earnestness, and our degeneracy in those great substantial qualities which made the American Revolution a grand success, while all that followed it in Europe have been most miserable failures? I call on you, by the memory of your fathers, by the pride of your race, by the love of your country, by the hopes of mankind, to aid, with all your strength, in setting up once more the standard of truth, and in restoring her dominion, ere it be too late. Doubtless she has still among us many a public champion, without fear and without reproach, and an ultimate protection from fatal outrage in the yet numerous host of our uncorrupted private citizens. Heaven pity us and all men, if she has not! For, when shamed by profligacy, and trampled down by recklessness, she slowly, reluctantly, but indignantly withdraws from any land, all history proclaims that its doom is sealed, its life principle is gone, and its subsequent activity is nothing save the struggles, and throes, and writhings of a great body that has *begun* to die; although, like the mighty republic of the ancient world, it may toss, for woful centuries, in the long and terrible process of dying! Should we ever deserve such fate—should Divine Justice ever be provoked to make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy—should their eyes ever become blinded to their priceless blessings, and their youthful glories ever suffer an eclipse, the gloom of such a catastrophe would shed disastrous twilight, not only over this new world, but over half

the nations of the old ; but should it be the Almighty Ruler's will, that in spite of our waywardness, the youth of this people shall still be renewed like the eagle's, which they have chosen for their emblem—should they grasp the thunder-bolt, not to strike the feeble, but to confound the guilty—should they be able to gaze undazzled even on the noontide splendor of their hopes, and, when tempests come, to cleave the adverse storm, and soar high into the pure serene of heaven—then shall many a heart, that has been mourning for all the abominations that are done amongst us, leap once more for joy, and many an eye, that has been turned in earnest longing towards this land of promise, shall brighten again with the assurance that oppression is doomed, and that the great day of liberty is drawing nigh !



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